

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 17 July 2014

Location: Talks Room

Attendees (staff):

Tom Gregan (TG) Head of Document Services (Chair); Caroline Ottaway-Searle (COS) Director of Public Services and Human Resources; Sarah Leggett (SL) Marketing Manager; Chris Mumby (CM) Head of Digitisation Services; Guy Grannum (GG) Discovery Product Manager; Julia Jones (JJ) Head of Information Management and Practice; Stephen Twigge (ST) Head of Modern Domestic, Diplomatic and Colonial; Janet Dempsey (JD) Principle Records Specialist – Maritime; Foluke Abiona (FA) Customer Intelligence Officer; Joanna Robinson (JCR) Customer Intelligence Assistant (Minutes).

Attendees (users):

David Matthew; Tom Adams; Graham Woolgar; John Seaman; Howard Llewellyn; P. Eismark; Levente Gajdocsi; Margaret Mehl.

1. TG welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Matters arising.

2.1 (2.4 05/14) TG asked with regard to a recent enquiry from GW on various MoD series [ADM 358, ADM 53 and WO 416] if he had received a reply from Ian Cross, TNA's Transfer and Accessions Manager. GW said he had been corresponding with Julia Jones and Ian Cross and was awaiting a response regarding ADM 358.

JJ said that WO 416 and ADM 358 will be available by the end of the year. She said that progress is dependent on the MoD and also on TNA's resources.

GW said JJ had previously given a list of record series which are being transferred as part of the accessioning process, but said it would be nice if updates on what is happening were included in the User Forum minutes.

2.2 (3.3 05/13) DM said he was not referring to FMP in this item, he was referring to Ancestry.

2.3 (2.5 05/14) Q. I have made two FOI requests concerning redacted newspaper articles which relate to information from courts in the 1930s. One of these has been approved and one has not. Was there at any time a policy to redact newspaper articles?

A. JJ said that this is not something TNA asks departments to do.

2.4 (3.16 05/14) TG asked that JK be thanked for her observations in respect of public service related issues. He said that we are looking into addressing a number of the matters raised and commented that as a direct consequence a number of additional lamps for use in the Map and Large Document reading room are currently on order.

2.5 (3.17 05/14) TG confirmed that we will make online statistics available along with the document production statistics.

2.6 (3.17 05/14) Q. It would be sensible if a URL link to the digitisation updates as well as the online statistics could be added to the User Forum agenda – attendees could thereby be clear on where they can access this useful information before attending User Forum.

A. TG said we will look to add these URLs to future User Forum agendas.

2.7 (3.12 05/14) It seems that TNA allows itself to be led by the commercial companies who digitise TNA's records. Some of these companies choose to cater to rather narrow and specific markets, such as S & N which is targeted to the genealogical market. Should TNA not make it a requirement that such companies' provide search capabilities and transcriptions which cater to as wide a market as possible?

A. CM said that companies approach TNA and request copies of records they wish to publish online. Most of the digitisations are paid for not by TNA but by the organisation that wishes to publish digitised versions of particular records. It is up to these companies how they present the data they create from the records; we cannot direct how they choose to present information to the market. CM suggested that users of commercial companies can exert influence on these companies by giving feedback to them on their presentation and the search options they provide.

SL said that commercially digitised records are always available at TNA, and that we provide access to all sites, including academic and popular sites, which use our records; Gale Cengage, for example, provides a service only to academic institutions, but the images are available to all at TNA. Commercial companies take the images and decide which ones they are interested in transcribing; they have rights to their own intellectual property.

2.8 Q. The MH 47 series is searchable via a range of options, such as name, occupation, and employer name. The series digitised by S&N has very narrow search options.

A. CM said that there are certain things we have control over; S&N took the images and decided what they wanted to transcribe. MH 47 was funded in a different way and there was more opportunity for us to create a searchable record.

2.9 (2.4 05/14) JJ said that if the Extraordinary User Forum on the work of Management and Practice held earlier in the year was considered useful, she would be happy to hold another.

2.10 (4.2 05/14) JJ said she wanted it noted in the minutes that TNA is grateful to DM for his work in alerting us to these issues with regard to Iron Mountain, and that his feedback has allowed us to pick up on mistakes which were made.

3. Update on Discovery

3.1 GG gave an update on the progress of Discovery 2. He said we are continuing to work on the new version, and are keen to receive further feedback:

<http://beta.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>. The Beta version of Discovery 2 is currently being user-tested by the TNA online community, and also by TNA staff and members of UAG. The current NRA, Manorial Documents online, Archon and A2A sites have links to the Discovery 2 Beta site, so users of these sites can give their opinion. GG said we expect the go-live date for Discovery 2 to be towards the end of July. GG took further questions on various technical aspects of Discovery 2 from attendees, and said comments would be noted and added to the Discovery log.

3.2 Q. I searched for 'Scotland' on the Beta version of Discovery 2, and was surprised that results were not arranged by time period. I feel it is confusing that dates are not fixed in chronological order.

A. GG said we will make a note of this and put it in to the Discovery Log. *[Post meeting note: GG said we have updated the date filter so that it is presented in chronological order, not frequency.]*

3.3 Q. A search for Richard II on Discovery came back with a result that said 2009.

A. GG said he would make a note of this. *[Post meeting note: GG said he ran a few searches for Richard II (Richard 2 and 1377-1399). He didn't find any specifically relating to Richard II for 2009, but it is entirely possible that a document relating to Richard II could be dated 2009. Some collections starting before or during Richard's reign can span hundreds of years, for example the department code PRO which contains documents dated between 974 and 2009]*

4. First World War 100 Update

4.1 SL and CM gave an update of the projects within FWW100. SL said that TNA views the centenary commemorations of the First World War as an opportunity to showcase our records to new audiences. She explained that we have been working in partnership with Imperial War Museum and others in the archive sector over the past two or three years on projects which it is hoped will engage new audiences with the commemorations, and with archives. Ideas are currently being formulated for 2019, when the commemorations will culminate with the centenary of the 1919 Versailles Treaty.

4.2 SL said that the digitisation of the WO 95 war diaries had provoked phenomenal worldwide interest, and the WO 95 digitisation project continues. Digitisation of Indian Infantry regiment records is due to follow later this year.

4.3 SL then spoke about Operation War Diary, which was launched in partnership with IWM and Zooniverse. There are 16,000 volunteers working on the project, which has made it possible to search war diaries by individual names. She encouraged attendees to become involved with the project: <http://www.operationwardiary.org/>

4.4 The digitisation of MH 47, KV 2 [The Security Service: Personal Files] and WO 400 [Soldiers' Documents: The Household Cavalry] were all launched online earlier this year.

4.5 SL said that Who Do You Think You Are Live in February saw a lot of public interest in TNA's records. The FWW100 project has been the focus of a wide range of events and workshops held at TNA, with TNA acting as a source of guidance to the wider archive sector on the commemorations. There have been a number of public events, including talks given by Jeremy Paxman and Kate Adie, and we have further talks and events planned. There is also a one day conference on 2014's FWW100 theme, Diplomacy, coming up.

4.6 FWW A Global View will be launched next week. SL said that this project will bring together records from worldwide archives, including colonial records and records from countries of the Empire. This project will include the facility to click on a country on a map, which will bring up details of records and photographs relating to that country.

ST said this is another way in for people to locate documents. He said that the project will expand next year to include Europe, Africa, Asia, the United States and the Middle East. He said if attendees have any ideas they would like to suggest to us on how the project could be developed, please get in touch.

4.7 SL said that we will be introducing a timeline project which will enable audiences to select a period and find information on records relevant to that time. She said we are always interested in suggestions for ways to reach new audiences, and in finding different ways to present access to our records,

4.8 SL then spoke about the launch date for the Outbreak of War project launch.

4.9 SL said that WO 339 [War Office: Officers' Services, First World War] had been catalogued over the last two to three years. She said that as it would be difficult to digitise this series, a lot of hard work has been put into cataloguing this records.

4.10 SL said that the digitisation of ADM 240 [Admiralty: Royal Naval Reserve: Officers' Service Records] and ADM 340 [Admiralty: Royal Navy, Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and Women's Royal Naval Service: Officers' Service Record Cards and Files] will soon be completed.

4.11 ST said next year's theme is 'Technology', and requested that attendees who would like to suggest ideas please get in touch and let us know your thoughts.

4.12 CM then spoke about the WO 95 First World War diaries project. He said the project has been a great success with approximately 1m records digitised, and 1.7m records still to be digitised. There will be some unavailability of WO 95 during the process, but we hope to limit the impact on readers; there will be a timetable of the digitisation on the website so it will be possible to see when records will be available. The project is scheduled to be completed by March 2015.

4.13 Q. The information so far has covered army records. What are your plans with regards to the digitisation of naval records? When can we expect to see work carried out on records of Jutland and the Dardanelles for example?

A. JD said that the FWW100 theme for 2017 is 'War at Sea and in the Air'. There will be some naval projects as part of the 'Technology' theme next year, but much more in 2017. She assured attendees that the war at sea will be a major part of TNA's commemoration programme.

SL added that we have so many records to explore that we have to pace ourselves; one way to achieve this is by having a theme each year, which allows the incorporation of different subjects. She said that alongside our main themes of Diplomacy, Technology, Home Front, Air and Sea, and Peace, we also have geographical themes running alongside which we are also trying to reflect.

CM said that if attendees have specific series they think should be digitised, they are welcome to suggest them. He advised that this may not mean suggested series will be digitised, but he pointed out that KV 2 came to be digitised as a result of a suggestion from User Forum.

4.14 Q. JJ suggested putting series number next to description on the FWW100 page on the website. SL agreed with this point.

4.15 Q. It would be easier to look through large digitised series such as WO 95, if you could search through in larger 'chunks'; at present, you have to move along the document five pages at a time, which is very time-consuming.

A. GG said that we are looking at increasing this option to 200 pages at a time. He also said we are working on separating chunks of these series, to make downloading more digestible.

4.16 Q. JJ asked how the plans for commemorating events on the Home front are progressing.

A. SL said that it is likely we will expand our Home Front plans, as there is so much to cover. We will be including records relating to Ireland, and the role of women within this theme.

4.17 Q. What kind of work is being done with school groups in relation to FWW100?

A. SL said the Education team are involved in a wide range of projects which cover FWW100, including a pilot scheme in which we will work with a battlefield tour company to promote resources for schools.

4.18 Q. Intelligence in the First World War laid the foundation stone for intelligence operations in WWII. How will intelligence be commemorated in FWW100?

A. ST said this subject will be covered in the 'Technology' theme of 2015.

5. A.O.B

5.1 Q. I am spending two or three days at TNA, and paying for accommodation whilst I am working here. During my time here, one of the printers has broken down. This has led to delays and queues; I need to print out approximately 500 wills, and I am annoyed that I will be wasting a lot of my time here waiting to do so.

A. TG apologised to the attendee for the inconvenience this has caused him, and assured him that we are working on fixing this problem.

Next meeting: Wednesday 20 August 2014, 12:30-13:45